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SCRAPS OF

DOMESTIC CONTROVERSY;

IN

A LETTER TO "Z."

BY

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GEORGE AKERS, M.A.

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J. M. J.

D.

To my Immaculate Mother and Queen, Mary Ever-Virgin, to whom I owe my own deliverance from error and admission into the Fold of Truth, I commend these pages, written with this one desire, to win her more children in the Home of her Divine Son. I am confident, that with her patronage and intercession they cannot but be fruitful, as without it they cannot but be fruitless.

Eve of S. Michael,

1869.

MY DEAR Z.,

Let me begin by assuring you that you are not a real person, but simply the personification of the various friends who have plied me with difficulties concerning the Catholic Church, her claims, and her attitude towards Anglicanism. As Mr. Ffoulkes's pamphlet has supplied arms to many of these, I shall imagine you to be putting him in the forefront of the battle; but neither do I profess to view or answer that *mauvaise brochure*, nor to touch on all the thousand-and-one matters with which the domestic controversialist usually assails one, but simply and *bond fide* to answer the various objections you *have* brought before me.

And first of all, my dear Z., I observe in you at once a certain shyness in conversing with me on our religious differences, and a very perceptible endeavour to store your mind with the telling things said against "Rome" by the weekly newspapers and by pamphlets such as Mr. Ffoulkes's. Well, there is nothing to complain of in that, as far as it goes.

The small controversy which I have called "domestic," so common now-a-days, particularly among friends smarting from that cruellest of wounds, religious separation, is not so important or so powerful a weapon as to be worth constantly bringing forth at the risk of the sore, sharp feelings with which it more often ends than with conviction to the beaten party. And it is a very wise policy, if you are not perfectly sure of making out a good case, to avoid weakening your force by a series of skirmishes. But what I complain of is, that having—may I presume to hint it?—a little nervous feeling that you may be wrong after all, and that you too ought to become a Catholic, you catch gratefully at all these hints, and tales, and arguments against "Rome," without allowing yourself the chance of knowing whether the hints are not base inuendoes, the tales, stories in the vulgar sense of the word, and the arguments limping in their logic. To take up and apply Dr. Newman's simile, you are poisoning your own well, so that poor Truth, at the bottom of it, is cruelly and effectually put out of the way. Now this is not *fair*. If it were on any philosophical opinion, or other mundane matter, you would be put down as a prejudiced person, and there would be an end of it. But in a matter of eternal interest, which must be settled rightly, and once for all, on this side the grave

(weigh well, please, each one of those words), you cannot be so let alone. To stake eternity on a speculation as to whether your faith be the right one, is a suicidal gambling, which justifies any one rushing in at all hazards to warn you; and you must be blind and deaf indeed, if you refuse even to take notice of the warning. It is by faith we are saved—this Protestants in words are very forward to profess; but this faith must be the *true* faith, faith in the Truth, or as the Catholic Catechism has it, to believe without doubting whatever God has revealed. So that a religion—your religion—does not become the more true because you happened to be born and brought up in it, or because it approves itself to your taste and reason. You must be assured that it is *the* religion which God became Man to teach you—the whole deposit of Faith as He gave it, without addition and without diminution. A Catholic will tell you at once that you can only get that Faith in the One Church which Jesus Christ founded, and in the obedience of its first public professor, S. Peter, whom He set as His Vicar on earth at the head of it. To believe and see this requires a supernatural grace, which you will certainly have, if you ask for it in all sincerity. But meanwhile, your church not only does not forbid, but encourages you to enquire and test as much as

you please every doctrine which is set before you to believe. Its living rulers, its principal teachers, its document and charter, the prayer-book, have not a word to say in hindrance; and practically every Anglican, even you yourself, does so again and again. How have you come by your present "High Church" views? They involve several of the most serious changes from the theology commonly taught when you and I were children—changes far too momentous to be made from anything less than a most firm conviction that they are the very Truth of God, to be embraced at all hazards, to whatever sacrifices and to whatever *consequences* (mark that) they may lead. It can never, *e.g.*, be an indifferent matter, or the subject of fluctuating opinion, whether our Lord Jesus Christ be really, personally and substantially present in the Eucharist under the species of bread and wine, or whether these be mere emblems of His presence and His death, significant and operative in various degrees, according to various schools of Protestant theology. Yet you claim leave from your church to hold the former as truth and to reject the latter; you quote documents and doctors in its favour, and labour to explain passages in the prayer-book or elsewhere which seem to contradict it. You would reject with indignation the idea that holding the Real Presence makes you a worse Anglican than

before. Why then are you so afraid of searching out the truth on other matters, and notably that of the claims of the Catholic Church? Is it because you perceive that such a process would lead you to abandon your present communion, or at any rate *might* do so? I will not suppose you to be so disingenuous in so awful a matter. It would be to say that you preferred to remain in error, or at least in the danger of error, rather than face a truth which would involve you in most painful sacrifices. And this truth, too, a supernatural and eternal one, on which your salvation must depend. For if you have a glimpse of the *possibility* of the "Roman claims" being true, and therefore God's voice to you, and yet shrink from them, what excuse can you plead in the last great account? The Church does not allow the plea of "invincible ignorance" to one in this condition.

But you will reply: "I know it is wrong to abandon the Church of England, and therefore I will not put myself in danger of being persuaded to do so: it would be yielding to temptation." My dear Z., establish this, and I will grant you that you ought to shut yourself up in your Anglicanism for evermore. But don't take it for granted. *Why* is it wrong to abandon the Church of England to become a Roman Catholic? Does any revelation say so? Have you it in the Bible or in the Creed?

In taking such a step, should you abandon the one or the other, or give up one fragment of their teaching? You know well enough that it is not so. And I must tell you, if you do not know, that the Catholic and Roman Church it is who is the witness and guardian of the Sacred Scriptures, and from whom have proceeded the creeds which you profess. Is, then, the Church of England exclusively, in your opinion, the Catholic Church; or does she pretend to make for herself any such claim? Or, on the other hand, do you, from your position, deny the Roman Church to be Catholic? You will answer "No," at once, to both these questions.

I will not dwell here on the very striking fact which claims your attention—that while the Anglican Church admits the Roman to be Catholic, the Roman denies that title to the Anglican; and that while the Anglican Church does not claim to exercise infallibility (which must needs be an attribute of the Church of Jesus Christ), the Catholic Church (which you call the Roman) has always made that claim.

But I will press for an answer to the question, "Why is it wrong to become a Catholic?" You cannot give me an answer based on anything better than purely human conviction. If you quote texts from the Bible, I can interpret them in the Church's

sense, and quote you others which I fancy you will find it hard to get over. And who is to interpret between us, and say which interpretation is right? You give me an Anglican view of the "Reformation," and I can even quote you Anglican clergymen—as, *e.g.*, Dr. Littledale—who will overturn it, and prove it to have been the most accursed work the Devil ever set his hand to. You have no living authority of your Church to appeal to, for they are all quarrelling among themselves on the most vital matters—(look at the Voysey case and the Bennett case at this present moment)—and agree at best only on a question of State establishment, as in the Irish question, or of appeal to the State as of ultimate authority.

With what sort of voice, then, can your Church defend you, and bid or forbid this or that course of action? Do not appeal to those points on which the Anglican Church is at union with Rome. There are, thank God, many such common points of accordance; but she has those from the Catholic Church from the time when she was her obedient daughter. The only excuse for her separate existence, as you must at once see, is the doctrines in which she *diverges* from Roman Catholic teaching. If there are none such, what excuse can be made for so horrible an act of schism? If there be, it is there

that I say you can have no ground for your convictions other than those of mere human reasoning. For, putting myself for a moment in your position, I find myself in a separate *local* Church, which bases, as we have seen, its excuse for existing on the right of local churches to reform themselves even in matters of doctrine (!) and on the assumption that she needed such a reform at the time when she began her separate existence. But in such an assumption and such an act she cannot be infallible, for our Blessed Lord did not give His promise to any local church or churches, but to the One Church in her totality. Had it been otherwise, we should have found the extraordinary phenomenon of one local church "reforming" in a contrary direction to another, and both claiming the promise of the unerring guidance of God's Holy Spirit! Where would that guidance or the truth be then?

Any such alterations stand, then, on their own merits, and the right to make them in like manner. At first sight such right is inconsistent with the magnificent promises upon which the Church rests her existence and her power. Our Lord says: "Lo, I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world." The reformers say that for many ages Christ had deserted His Church, and left her to be possessed with a lying Spirit. Our Lord says:

“Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church.” And the reformers denounce and reject the confession* of faith of S. Peter in his successors. Our Lord says: “He that refuseth to hear the Church, let him be to thee as a heathen and a publican.” Yet the Church of England, equally with foreign Protestant bodies, owes her present mode of existence to men who had broken away from the ecclesiastical authorities they found set over them; and some, like Cranmer, had broken the most solemn vows a man can possibly bind himself with in the sight of God. Apostate monks married celibates; prelates, who pledged their obedience to the Pope, with the mental determination to rebel against him,—these are the founders of Anglicanism in all its differentiæ from Roman Catholicism.

Neither, I fear, will you find much encouragement to this right of reformation in the rest of the New Testament. S. Paul says: “If I, or an Angel of God, preach to you another Gospel than that which you have received, let him be anathema.”

Indeed, it would be a strange anomaly if there

* It will be seen that I have taken as more *ad hominem* the alternative left by S. Augustine of supposing the rock of faith to be the confession of S. Peter, and not S. Peter himself. For myself, I need not say that I prefer the sentiment of the majority of the Fathers, who attributed it to S. Peter.

did exist such a right. For when the Spirit of Truth had come, Who was to teach all things, and lead into all Truth, how could it be that anything which that Church which He possessed had taught could be erroneous, and need alteration, or that any part, rebelling against the whole, could convict it of error? As soon as you allow that the Church has erred in her teaching, in the very least little matter, from the Gospel truth which Jesus Christ committed to her charge, you either imply that she has no divine commission, and so that we cannot get at the Truth at all in this world, or else that since He sent her the gates of hell have prevailed against her, which is directly counter to His promise, and would lead us to doubt Him and His words, as well as those of His Church.

But I know there are some who cut the knot by saying that Christ did not leave any such authority or infallibility to His Church in any wise; that He taught the Gospel and commanded her to preach it, leaving her subject to all the dangers of error till the end, when He should come and put all straight. And that meanwhile each one has to do his best, using his reason, praying for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and content to remain in the dark about the many doctrinal questions which are bandied to and fro. I know many very high Churchmen put

out some such theory as this, disguising it as well as they can with fair words, but unable really to conceal the fact that this is really throwing up their hands in despair and falling back upon the old "private judgment" theories of the ultra-protestants. What else is it when they talk of belief in the doctrine of the Church's infallibility as a kind of spiritual dram-drinking, deadening the individual conscience to its own responsibilities. This expression, which I have met in more than one book, seems to me from those who use it very much like calling the grapes sour; and moreover very inconsistent. For what do these gentlemen rest the whole body of their Tractarian teaching upon, save on the Church's authority, and what do they profess more to deplore than the abeyance of primitive discipline? Yet, when they find men resting upon that authority and submitting to that discipline, they call it, forsooth, spiritual dram-drinking! Those who talk thus can have very little idea what the Church's authority is in practice to her children. That it is a rest to the soul beyond all conception is most true, but that it deadens the conscience or hinders a man's true liberty, this is absurdly untrue. You might as well say that the light hinders your liberty of running your head against a post!

The Church's authority is the authority of Jesus

Christ. Men who are not Christians find the yoke of Christianity and the moral code of the Gospels too severe for them; it robs them, they say, of their liberty. But how strange to find this cry re-echoed by those who are standing up for Christ against an unbelieving world, who complain of their own rulers because they do not boldly enough condemn error and expel it from their pale! Yet it is no more than this which the Roman Church is doing. If men believe the truth she teaches, let them submit to it—the Truth of God cannot be content with an half-allegiance—if not, they must quit her pale, they are none of hers. Where is the hardship here, or how is it possible for the Church to be faithful to her divine commission without being thus exclusive?

Yet we find now-a-days the phenomenon of men like Mr. Ffoulkes becoming Catholics, which they can only do by confessing the Church to be their infallible teacher and guide to Heaven, and then beginning to criticise her words and her actions! Such men would have had faults to find with our Blessed Lord when He was on earth, and with equal justice. For the Church has no other authority, and exercises no other, than that of our Lord Jesus Christ committed to her.

It is quite apart from my present subject to deal with the questions raised in Mr. Ffoulkes' pamphlet,

and which seem to you so telling against Rome. I hope you have so far benefited by the teaching of your own Church as to reject with indignation his tampering with an integral part of the Nicene Creed; but that very thing should suffice to show you both how easy it is to make up a case against any particular exercise of the Church's authority, and that you cannot impair this latter without loosening the hold of the Faith upon your soul. Are you prepared to study the history of every article of the faith you profess, and to accept or reject it according to the force of its evidence and history? You receive and believe it, as I hope, on the authority of God revealing it; and who is it who has conveyed this faith to the world, clothed with His authority, and protecting it against error by fresh definitions as occasion required, save the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church under its one earthly head, the successor of S. Peter? Find me in the primitive history which you are so fond of appealing to, one instance of the Church in communion with Rome falling into error, or one case where those who separated from her were acknowledged by the rest of the world as orthodox Catholics. And if things be so, is it not strange that in our latter days all this should be altered, and the Roman Church be held corrupt, while all who separate from

her, agreeing on no other thing, should be counted in this respect orthodox? The whole of Mr. Ffoulkes' positions are marked with this absurdity, that professing to belong to a Church who is nothing if she be not the authorized divine teacher of the nations, and whose head he must, as a Catholic, confess to be the Vicar of Christ, he can yet think himself at liberty to criticise her doctrine and charge Christ's Vicar with gaining his power by means the most flagrantly dishonest. Do you not see that this is a contradiction in terms? I have endeavoured to show you that one cannot imagine the true Church without these attributes. But if she have them, certainly she must be trusted and obeyed with implicit confidence. If she have them not, away with her, she is no home for Christ's children.

But you have, I know, led yourself to suppose that the doctrines of the Roman Church in the present century are not those of the Catholic Church in the early ages. It would be sad if it were so, for then Christ's promises would be void, and the very Gospel liable to suspicion. For there is certainly no other body which can claim an unbroken succession from the Apostles, in which those promises might be fulfilled. But after all is not this proceeding just as ultra-protestants who judge all churches and all doctrines by the Bible, that is by their own interpreta-

tion of it, and fall into inextricable confusion? Only you substitute the Fathers and ecclesiastical historians for the sacred scriptures, and have to go through a much more cumbrous process at least as liable to error. The Catholic Church declares to you that her present teaching is that which has been handed down from the Apostles' time until now. Her doctors prove this most learnedly from the very Fathers to whom you appeal. Are you more likely to be right than they? Or if you appeal to Barrow, Bramhall, and the rest of your controversialists, do you not see that they write as interested parties to defend their own separation, that they are confined to one country and three centuries, while the Catholic doctors are of every age, from every country, and having no schism to justify? S. Thomas Aquinas or S. Bonaventure taught what they had received to hold from time immemorial, and you would find it difficult to point out in them any difference from more modern controversialists, such as Bellarmine or De Perron, or between these again and such men as Balmez and Möhler.

In truth, it is as true to say that the articles of the Tridentine creed were "invented," as to say that the Homousios was "invented" at Nicæa, the Theotokes at Ephesus, or the doctrine of S. Leo's magnificent Tome at Chalcedon. Nobody imagines those doc-

trines to be novel because they were there *defined*, and it would be hard to say, for instance, why the Lateran Council should not as fitly define Transubstantiation when the Real Presence was impugned, as the Nicene did the Homousios when the Arians desired the Godhead of the Son. If the authority of the Church be considered, it was exercised in the one case as much as in the other ; if you accept doctrines as they approve themselves to your reason, you become at once a Protestant, to whom the Church is unintelligible and unnecessary ; but even so, you will find it hard to say, why you should believe one more than the other. They are both facts transcending the senses, and both based on the same authority. If that authority errs in the one case how can you trust it in the other ? But if in the first instance it is the voice of God to you, how has it become the voice of man in the second ?

But you fly to a distinction between the whole Church, and the Church of Rome. We have seen already that that can hardly stand. You can only base it on your reading, or rather on your teachers' reading, of the Fathers and early history. But listen to Dr. Newman, the most patient and able student of those authorities, where he tells you in his *Apologia* that he had found more testimony in the Fathers to the Supremacy of the Pope than to the

Real Presence. How can you make out that your friends are right in this matter, and Dr. Newman wrong? And yet, how can you bear to remain in uncertainty about a matter above all others vital? For if after all the Pope be what he claims to be, you are unchurched. Well, I know what you fall back upon. You recall all the bad things you have heard against Rome and the Popes. You cannot open a newspaper without seeing the present Pontiff denounced as hostile to modern society, and endangering Christianity itself by his obstinate refusal to change. Every now and then some one breaks away from his ranks and is condemned, and you immediately give him your sympathy, and make a martyr of him, for what reason it would be hard to say, save that he is a bad Catholic, and in common with yourself sets himself in opposition to S. Peter. If such an one left the Church, he would be consistent and have a claim to be heard, but to call himself a Catholic and then to criticise the Church whom he owns as his mother, this is outrageously dishonest.

But three centuries of rooted and inveterate prejudice again and again stirred up cannot be so soon swept out of one's mind. The principal grounds of the prejudice have been swept out of your mind—that I know; but the prejudice itself remains, and if you examine yourself carefully, you will admit that it is

so. Do you not feel disposed more readily to believe what is said against Rome, than what is said for her? In the latter case, is there not a certain repulsion which makes you disposed, *à priori*, to doubt what is said? Or even to go further, have you not a sort of feeling that Catholics are dishonest in their writings? that they will not scruple to strain a point, or even to tell a falsehood, to gain a proselyte, that their quotations from the Fathers are "garbled," and that they themselves are in reality very different from what they would fain appear to you? All this is the natural consequence of drinking out of poisoned wells. If you have a friend or relation whom you still think highly of, you say, "He is an exception," or, "He has not yet been affected by the bad company he has got into." But it takes a long time indeed to persuade you that it is your judgment of the Church and of Catholics that is in error, and not the Spouse of Christ and mother of Saints herself. "By their fruits ye shall know them." And the Saints, of whose lives you know something at any rate, the Religious, the great doctors of the Church, with those many holy souls who reflect even at the present day the life of Christ among men in their different occupations—these are not the fruits of a tree blasted with spiritual pride, stained with falsehood, of a Church herself in error, and leading astray those who trust to her.

Well, when you are beaten out of the entrenchments of prejudice and ignorance, you take up quite another tack, and would persuade me that we are all of the same Church, though "Rome" does not recognize you; that in due time the Anglican communion will be cleared of all the blemishes that you acknowledge, and that "Rome" will meet her on equal terms, so that the two churches will embrace and be friends without any further trouble. Strange delusion to persist in the face of stubborn facts more plainly staring you in the face every day! And a delusion which all but yourselves—that is, the extreme "high" party in the Church of England—see and proclaim.

In the first place there is this stubborn fact that you are *not* one communion. Whose ever fault it is there the fault remains. You would *like* to be of one communion with us, no doubt. And you have good reasons to give—mutual misunderstanding, state interference in England, Papal arrogance abroad—why we are not at one. Still, the Church in communion with Rome does not acknowledge the claims of the Church in communion with Canterbury, and that in its turn does not acknowledge the claims of the Roman Church. Now, setting aside the little difficulty that Canterbury denies Transubstantiation, Purgatory, the Immaculate Conception, and

a few other dogmas which Rome has declared *de fide*, and supposing, *per impossibile*, that both parties could allow these to be open questions (?), do you not see that this one fact provides an insurmountable difficulty. The two churches are constructed on a perfectly different organism, on quite opposite theories. And Rome declares her constitution to be divine, namely that by our Lord's ordinance, S. Peter and his successors have supreme authority over all the other rulers of the Church, while Canterbury declares all bishops to be equal, and leaves it open to doubt what bond save their own mutual consent, binds them all together. She cannot say more, moreover, than that she *thinks* this to be our Lord's ordinance, for she does not even profess to be an unerring guide. Now, Rome cannot admit Canterbury into communion on its own terms, or on any other middle terms without throwing over her own claims, which she declares to be divine, and herself infallible. But, if they are so, she cannot alter them without disobeying the Lord who sent her. So, you see, we come back to the old difficulty. And if Rome be indeed erroneous in that claim, she falls to pieces, and it is difficult to say what you would ally yourself with in joining her communion. Certainly I do not think she would be very worth joining if convicted of so radical an error,

with all the consequent errors which the whole body of her teaching would then be judged to be.

But I must not go on for ever. Let me reduce into few words the points which I wish you to consider.

I. If the claim of the Holy Roman Church to be the divinely sent Teacher of all mankind be true, I am not to wait till I *understand* all her doctrines, but to receive them *on the authority of God revealing them* through her.

II. This claim then is the one which I am brought face to face with, and ought to weigh most carefully, asking the help of the Holy Ghost.

III. This claim concerns *me* and my salvation. It cannot therefore be put off, or set aside after a superficial consideration.

IV. It is a claim in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and concerns Eternity. I must not then let any worldly considerations, or claims of this earth, even the nearest and dearest ties, weigh with me one atom in judging of it.

V. Still less must I suffer prejudice, idle talk, or one-sided reading to affect my judgment, or the action I take in this matter.

There are five points for you to consider. And I will add to these three counsels, placing the grand one last : Read, think, pray.

Some refuse to read anything which might convince them. Others, who read, give their reading no serious thought. And those who both read and think, will be certainly liable to go hopelessly astray if they do not pray. For it is "God that giveth the increase." Say, then, the Hymn, *Veni Creator Spiritus*, adore the Will of God, and trust Him not to suffer the least little one to go astray that has set his hope in Him.

Believe me, my dear Z.,

Yours very affectionately,

GEORGE AKERS.

S. Edward's Day, 1869.

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